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ABSTRACT

The National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools was formed in 1987 by the Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, and the National Council for the Social Studies to study the state of social studies in the schools and to make recommendations for curricular change. The Commission's curriculum report, "Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century (1989). is based on an exhaustive examination of the social studies curricula in the past and present. This digest outlines the essential elements of the Commission's curriculum report on goals and general recommendations for the social studies: (1) development of civic responsibility and citizen participation; (2) development of a global perspective through an understanding of students' life experiences as a part of the total human experience, past and present; (3) development of "Critical Understanding" of the history, geography, and the pluralistic nature of the civil institutions of the United States; (4) development of a multicultural perspective on the world's peoples through an understanding of their differences and commonalities throughout time and place; and (5) development of students' capacities for critical thinking about the human condition. Curriculum recommendations for grades K-6, and grades 7-12 are presented along with recommendations about teaching strategies. A 9-item reference list concludes the digest. (DB)

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by Sandra L. Mullins

The National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools was formed in 1987 by the Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, and the National Council for the Social Studies to study the state of social studies in the schools and to make recommendations for curricular change. The Commission's curriculum report, CHARTING A COURSE: SOCIAL STUDIES FOR THE 21st CENTURY (1989), is based on an exhaustive examination of the social studies curriculum in the past and present. This ERIC Digest summarizes the essential elements of the Commission's curriculum report on (1) goals and general recommendations for the social studies, (2) curriculum recommendations for grades K-6, (3) curriculum recommendations for grades 7-12, and (4) recommendations about teaching strategies.

Goals and General Recommendations for the Social Studies. The Commission's Curriculum Task Force (1989) recommends the following goals for social studies education: (1)) development of civic responsibility and citizen participation; (2) development of a global perspective through an understanding of students' life experiences as part of the total human experience, past and present; (3) development of "critical understanding" of the history, geography, and the pluralistic nature of the civil institutions of the United States; (4) development of a multicultural perspective on the world's peoples through an understanding of their differences and commonalities throughout time and place, and (5) development of students' capacities for critical thinking about "the human condition."

In line with these five goals, the Curriculum Task Force emphasizes the following characteristics of content in the social studies:

- History and geography should be the unifying core of the social studies curriculum and should be integrated with concepts from economics, political science, and other social sciences.
- Social studies should be taught and learned consistently and cumulatively from kindergarten through grade 12.
- The curriculum should impart skills and knowledge necessary for effective citizenship in a democracy.
- The curriculum should balance study of the United States with studies of other cultures.
- Superficial coverage of content should be replaced with in-depth study of selected topics.

Curriculum Recommendations for Grades K-6. The organizing matrix for the K-3 program is time and place with concepts from the social sciences woven into the curriculum. The traditional expanding environments program has been modified in favor of a comparative global approach. The Task Force advised that the time for social studies instruction during the early years should be found through integrating the social studies materials with reading and mathematics instruction.

The kindergarten program should revolve around a comparative study of families at home and around the globe. By widening the scope of the curriculum to families throughout the world, children gain an international perspective. Understandings about the social rules that govern family life and how families interact with their environment can increase the student's knowledge about him/herself, improve social interaction skills, and develop decision-making and participation skills.

In the first grade, the program should be expanded to include the community, and the structures and workings of social and political groups. Students learn the ways in which people organize social, political, and economic institutions to meet the human needs for affection, protection from danger, and the production and dissemination of goods.

Grades two and three should focus on a broad study of societies in the United States and around the globe. The teacher should select key figures, heroes, holidays, and cultural symbols from different societies, past and present, to provide in-depth study of those societies. The Task Force maintains that basic concepts of the social sciences, such as change, location, diversity, justice, power, and trade-offs, can be introduced effectively through concrete applications during the second and third grades.

The Curriculum Task Force recommends that United States history, world history, and geography—both physical and cultural—should be taught in grades 4-6, with much of the content also drawn from the social sciences, especially political science, economics, and anthropology. United States history should cover the period from colonial beginnings to the present, with topics selected for in-depth study. An introduction to the basic documents of United States government, especially the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, and the central concepts of democracy—personal freedom, equality, participation of the governed in government—need to be taught in this course. The world history course should focus on the major economic, social, and political trends throughout history. The study of physical and cultural geography should introduce students to the world's climate, topography, soils, and water resources and to various aspects of human interactions with the natural environment.

Curriculum Recommendations for Grades 7-12. Grade seven is the recommended level for a study of the local community, including the history of the school district. Through a microscopic look at the local community, students can begin to understand the human interactions that take place within a social system, and the relationship of the local community to the state, nation, and world. Students should begin to gain skills and knowledge for effective, active citizenship, and they should gain an understanding that a thorough knowledge of public issues is nec-

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essary for active citizenship. State history and geography can be taught along with the study of the local community.

A study of United States history is recommended for grade eight. This course should stress the political and economic development of the United States and its relationship with the rest of the world. A study of how the social and economic changes of the 19th and 20th century shaped the United States Constitution will give students a greater understanding of the political process. A comparative study of capitalism, socialism, and communism through an examination of selective case studies of different kinds of economic systems should take place. Concepts from economics, government or political science, and the behavioral sciences should be integrated into this study.

For grades 9-11, a three-year sequence of world history and American history is recommended. The Task Force pointed out that a study of United States history within the context of world history will help students make the important linkages between events on the national and world stage, and provide them with a global perspective. If a separate course for United States history is required by state law, the teacher can establish a specific time frame for that purpose. Although, there are not yet appropriate textbook materials for such a course sequence, teachers could combine the use of their present world history and United States history textbooks, and use supplemental materials.

Grade nine would start the three-year sequence with a study of world and American history and geography to 1750. This course should focus on the history and geography of the major civilizations beginning with hunting and gathering societies. The instructional approach should be to compare the different civilizations by selecting particular themes such as technological innovations or economic and social developments. The consequences of the cultural contact between the Old and New Worlds after Columbus' voyages should be explored. A specific time frame should be established for teaching about the colonial history and geography of the United States.

Grade 10 continues the three-year sequence with studies of world and United States history and geography from 1750 to 1900. This course should focus on the transformation of modern times by the democratic, industrial, and technological revolutions and the effects of population growth and movement. The teacher should attempt to show how the pivotal movements of the modern world interacted. Careful study should be given to the conception and growth of political democracy and to the difficulties inherent in maintaining a government based on popular will.

The study of United States and world history culminates in grade 11. The main themes for 20th-century study are (1) the worldwide spread of democracy; (2) the industrial-technological revolution; and (3) the demographic shifts that resulted from improved health care, transportation, and changed family relationships.

Government and economics are taught at the 12th grade level, and they can be combined into one course or taught separately. The American government course should include an analysis of the founding documents of United States government—the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and *The Federalist Papers*. A comparative look at the worlds' competing political and economic systems should be included in this course.

The theme of the economics course ought to be the different ways that humans have organized markets for services and products throughout the world and in different time periods. Attention should be given to how people have decided what should be produced, in what way, and who should receive the finished product. If the government and economics course are combined at the senior level, students could examine the relationships and interactions between the political and economic systems throughout time and space.

Teaching Strategies. Although the primary focus of the curriculum report is on content—scope, selection, content priorities, and sequence—it is also clear that the Curriculum Task Force envisions a social studies curriculum that would be taught in an exciting way to promote the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are essential for democratic participation. The first priority is in-depth study of selected topics to replace mere "coverage" of content. The passive transmission of facts is rejected as an inappropriate method of teaching that should be modified in favor of active approaches to learning. Students are to engage in reading, writing, observing, debating, role play, simulations, and the use of statistical data to develop skills in critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving. Cooperative and collaborative types of learning are also emphasized.

The Curriculum Task Force suggests that a rich variety of materials should be included in teaching and learning such as original sources, literature, films, television, artifacts, photographs, historical maps, computers, and courseware. They also point out that teachers need administrative support and ample time both for in-service training to implement new teaching strategies and for planning their courses of study.

In K-3 grades, it is suggested that field trips, films, songs, and stories should be used to capture and keep the attention of the young. As history is introduced at an earlier grade level, it is recommended that time and place should be integrated into the curriculum by locating new experiences in space, with the use of maps and globes, and in time, by using time lines measured in terms of "grandfathers." The value of the pedagogical principle of teaching back and forth from the familiar to the new and back to the familiar in the early years is recognized.

References and ERIC Resources

The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest and a list of related social studies reform literature. The items followed by an ED number are in the ERIC system and are available in microfiche and paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia 22304; telephone numbers are 703-823-0500 and 800-227-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number are annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), which is available in most libraries. EJ documents are not available through EDRS; however, they can be located in the journal section of most libraries by using the bibliographic information provided below.

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